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ABSTRACT

It has been suggested that current measures used in investigating religion are a mixture of questions concerning values, beliefs, and behaviors and are mixed in their factorial purity. Another difficulty is that there is a relative lack of research on different religions and their specific beliefs. The present study utilized a scale of homogeneous focus in order to delineate the beliefs and religious activities of a group of fundamentalistic Christians as compared to a control sample of college students. The subjects included students (N=44) enrolled in a fundamentalistic Christian bible study group and students (N=73) enrolled in undergraduate psychology courses. The two groups were administered the revised, Likert version of the Walker and Wrobel (1987) Scale of Theistic Beliefs, a modified form of the Brown and Lowe (1951) Religious Participation Scale, and a demographic information questionnaire. On the Scale of Theistic Beliefs, the bible study group scored significantly higher than the college sample in the keyed theistic direction, and on the total scale score. On the Religious Participation Scale, the bible study group scored significantly higher on all seven dimensions assessed in the direction of more frequent participation, placing greater importance on their church, and reporting a stronger faith. Results may reflect the greater homogeneity of the bible study group with less emphasis on individual interpretation of the college group. This points to a most interesting difference between the nature of the religious experience of the two samples. References and four tables are included. (ABL)

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Beliefs and Religious Behaviors in Fundamentalist Christian
and College Students

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Beliefs and Religious Behaviors in Fundamentalist Christian and College Students

Gorsuch (1984), in a critique of the measurement paradigm in investigating religion, reports several difficulties in the area. He maintains that many current measures tend to be a mixture of questions concerning values, beliefs and behaviors and mixed in their factorial purity. Another deficiency Gorsuch cites is that there is a relative lack of research on different religious orientations and their specific beliefs. The present study attempted to address both criticisms by utilizing a scale of homogeneous focus in order to delineate the beliefs and religious activities of a group of fundamentalistic Christians as compared to a control sample of college students.

The Scale of Theistic Beliefs utilized in the study was developed by Walker and Wrobel (1987) utilizing assertions about theism found in Bergin (1980a; 1980b). Their intention was to construct upon a theoretical structure a focused measure of theistic beliefs. More recently the original True-False format has been modified to a Likert format with increased internal consistency, supporting the intent to develop a focused measure of theistic beliefs (Wrobel & Stogner, 1988).

Method

Subjects

The subjects consisted of two samples, a sample of 44 students enrolled in a fundamentalistic Christian Bible-Study group and 73 students enrolled in undergraduate psychology courses. The Bible-Study group consisted of 57% females and 42% males, had a mean age of 46.9 years, a mean of 12 years of education, and 100% identified themselves as Protestant. The college sample consisted of 70% females and 30% males, had a mean age of 24.1 years, and a mean of 17.3 years of education. This group identified their religious

preference as 25% Catholic; 36% Protestant; 1% Hindu; 22% Other; 9% Religious, no preference; 6% Not religious; and 0% Jewish or Islamic.

Measures

The two groups were administered the revised, Likert version of the Walker and Wrobel (1987) Scale of Theistic Beliefs, a modified form of the Brown and Lowe (1951) Religious Participation Scale and a demographic information questionnaire.

Analysis

The item-total correlations and internal consistency coefficients were calculated for the Scale of Theistic Beliefs. The two groups were compared on item responses for the Scale of Theistic Beliefs items and total score as well as the Religious Participation Scale via t-tests.

Results

The calculated alpha coefficient for the Scale of Theistic Beliefs was .73. The mean item performance for each group is summarized in Tables 1, 2 and 3. The groups differed significantly on 21 of the 40 items, with the Bible-study group scoring significantly higher than the college sample in the keyed theistic direction on 18 of the 21, and the Bible-study group was significantly higher than the college sample on the total scale score, $t(85) = 4.36$, $p < .01$.

The data from the Religious Participation questions is presented in Table 4. The Bible-study group was significantly higher on all seven dimensions assessed in the direction of more frequent participation, placing greater importance on their church, and reporting a stronger faith.

Discussion

King and Hunt (1975), identified factors of religiosity which they named Creedal Assent, Growth and Striving, and Church Attendance. From the results of the present study, a pattern of difference between the responses of the Bible-Study and college groups is evident. The Bible-Study group scored

higher on items of Creedal Assent such as the scale Item 1 "I believe God is Supreme," and Item 2 "I believe as individuals we are subject to God's ultimate authority and will seek out God's purpose in our lives." In addition, the Bible-Study group scored higher on all of the religious participation items, similar to King and Hunt's Church Attendance factor. The Bible-Study students reported that they more frequently prayed, read scriptures, contributed financially to their church as well as attended church. Characteristic of this group was their more homogeneous composition relative to the college students with perhaps the not unexpected result of less variability in their belief and behavior.

The college students scored in the more theistic direction on only three items. Inspection of those items appears to reflect what King and Hunt named Growth and Striving. For instance, the college students scored significantly higher in the theistic direction (note that in Table 2 the items were recoded) on items such as Item 11 "Values are relative" and Item 18 "Knowledge is obtained only through self-effort and efforts of others." Perhaps these results, too, reflect the greater homogeneity of belief in the Bible-Study group with less emphasis on the individual interpretation of beliefs relative to more emphasis on individual interpretation in the college group. This finding points to a most interesting difference between the nature of the religious experience of the two samples.

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Table 1

Theistic Scale of Religious Beliefs Items Scored Significantly

Higher by Bible-Study Group

Item	Group			t
	College	Bible-Study		
1. I believe God is supreme.	$\bar{X}$ 5.97 SD 1.64	7.00 0.00		3.86**
2. I believe as individuals we are subject to God's ultimate authority and will seek out God's purpose in our lives.	$\bar{X}$ 5.05 SD 1.94	6.59 .94		4.88**
4. Service to others and self-sacrifice are essential to life.	$\bar{X}$ 4.75 SD 1.89	6.32 1.01		5.51**
5. Forgiveness of others who have wronged us and caused us distress is essential for further growth.	$\bar{X}$ 5.46 SD 1.60	6.47 .90		3.82**
9. A person's self-control can be measured in terms of adherence to absolute values.	$\bar{X}$ 4.13 SD 1.56	5.30 1.77		3.58**
10. One of the main purposes of marriage is procreation.	$\bar{X}$ 3.26 SD 1.86	4.15 2.17		2.26*
15. Real self-esteem is possible only with a proper understanding and relationship with God.	$\bar{X}$ 4.13 SD 2.11	6.06 1.28		5.43**
16. It is our understanding of the eternal which gives our life meaning.	$\bar{X}$ 4.47 SD 1.91	6.38 1.06		6.08**
20. Marriage options, such as open marriage, traditional marriage, or no marriage are equally desirable.	$\bar{X}$ 4.71 SD 2.07	6.04 1.79		3.48**
21. Sexual self gratification, with mutually chosen partners, is permissible with or without long term commitment.	$\bar{X}$ 4.40 SD 2.18	6.48 1.36		5.63**
23. Satisfaction of our own needs is central to personal growth. ¹	$\bar{X}$ 2.95 SD 1.65	3.70 2.28		1.98**
25. Commitment in the marriage relationship, fidelity and loyalty to family life are essential and important.	$\bar{X}$ 6.52 SD 1.13	6.90 .37		2.13*

(Table 1 continued)

Item	Group		
	College	Bible-Study	t
28. One is personally responsible for his actions and their effect.	$\bar{X}$ 5.72 SD 1.44	6.34 1.27	2.35*
32. Commitment to a higher cause is central to personal growth.	$\bar{X}$ 4.82 SD 1.54	6.41 .93	5.85**
33. Change is dependent upon our acceptance of guilt, suffering and a genuine feeling of remorse for our actions.	$\bar{X}$ 4.81 SD 1.62	5.80 1.82	2.76**
34. Recreational sex is a viable means of self expression.	$\bar{X}$ 5.05 SD 1.91	6.35 1.28	3.81**
35. Forgiveness of those who have hurt us is essential to our psychological well-being.	$\bar{X}$ 5.71 SD 1.42	6.30 1.45	2.10*
36. Restitution to those we have wronged is essential to complete the therapeutic process of change.	$\bar{X}$ 5.16 SD 1.31	5.92 1.56	2.72**
37. Meaning and purpose in life are ultimately dependent on spiritual insight.	$\bar{X}$ 4.61 SD 1.74	6.33 1.14	5.73**
40. Intellectual, emotional and spiritual paths to knowledge and truth are equally valid.	$\bar{X}$ 4.97 SD 1.53	5.85 1.75	2.79**

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ ¹Recoded so that 7 was the theistic direction and 1 the non-theistic direction

Table 2
Theistic Scale of Religious Beliefs Items Scored Significantly
Higher by College Students

Item	Group			
		College	Bible-Study	t
6. Minimizing guilt and relieving suffering as soon as possible are prerequisites in behavior change. ¹	$\bar{X}$	2.91	2.22	2.26*
	SD	1.60	1.47	
11. Values are relative. ¹	$\bar{X}$	2.81	2.50	.91*
	SD	1.68	1.79	
18. Knowledge is obtained only through self-effort and efforts of others. ¹	$\bar{X}$	2.66	1.95	2.35*
	SD	1.55	1.60	

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

¹Recoded so that 7 was the theistic direction and 1 the non-theistic direction

Table 3

Theistic Scale of Religious Beliefs Items Not Significantly
Different Between College and Bible Study Students

Item	Group			
		College	Bible-Study	t
3. Acceptance and expression of accusatory feelings are necessary and sufficient for behavior change. ¹	$\bar{X}$	3.62	3.00	1.87
	SD	1.59	1.76	
7. Faith is unnecessary in the acquisition of knowledge. ¹	$\bar{X}$	4.61	5.12	1.22
	SD	2.01	2.33	
8. Meaning and purpose are the products of one's intellect and reason. ¹	$\bar{X}$	3.08	1.61	1.07
	SD	2.73	1.78	
12. We alone are responsible for our behavior.	$\bar{X}$	5.30	5.88	1.68
	SD	1.76	1.92	
13. Man is the measure of all things. ¹	$\bar{X}$	4.59	4.64	.13
	SD	1.77	2.05	
14. Autonomy and internal direction are more important than any external authority. ¹	$\bar{X}$	3.56	3.82	.68
	SD	1.73	2.26	
17. Guilt is unnecessary if restitution has been made. ¹	$\bar{X}$	3.37	2.86	1.35
	SD	1.91	2.06	
19. Issues of values, morality and ethics are based on universal moral laws.	$\bar{X}$	3.91	4.36	1.09
	SD	1.99	2.21	
22. The ability to love and be loved is essential for growth.	$\bar{X}$	6.50	6.63	.64
	SD	.99	1.27	
24. An apology is necessary and sufficient to atone for the harmful effects of our behavior.	$\bar{X}$	3.54	3.43	.27
	SD	1.85	2.48	
26. One's psychological problems are usually caused by other people. ¹	$\bar{X}$	4.72	5.37	1.68
	SD	1.92	2.03	
27. Self satisfaction is essential for personal growth to ensue. ¹	$\bar{X}$	2.58	2.77	.54
	SD	1.55	2.06	
29. Faith and self effort are both necessary to gain knowledge.	$\bar{X}$	5.26	5.74	1.46
	SD	1.57	1.91	
30. Personal identity is mortal. ¹	$\bar{X}$	3.36	3.48	.34
	SD	1.50	2.15	

(Table 3 continued)

Item		Group		
		College	Bible-Study	t
31. Ultimately, one achieves self-worth and and self esteem based on one's relationships with others. ¹	$\bar{X}$ SD	3.20 1.59	2.65 1.91	1.63
38. Morality and ethics are situation specific and must be judged on an individual basis. ¹	$\bar{X}$ SD	3.20 1.87	3.92 2.44	1.73
39. Intellectual knowledge is inseparable from the emotional and spiritual.	$\bar{X}$ SD	3.38 1.79	3.91 2.31	1.34

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

¹Recoded so that 7 was the theistic direction and 1 the non-theistic direction

Table 4
Mean and Standard Deviation for College (n=73) and
Bible Study Groups on Religious Participation Items

		Group		t-test
		College	Bible-Study	
Pray ¹	$\bar{x}$	4.92	5.75	2.25*
	SD	1.98	1.56	
Read Scriptures	$\bar{x}$	3.07	5.22	6.73**
	SD	1.66	1.52	
Attend Church	$\bar{x}$	4.26	6.42	5.40**
	SD	2.28	1.43	
Contribute Financially to Church	$\bar{x}$	3.71	6.14	5.93**
	SD	2.30	1.63	
Feel God's Nearness	$\bar{x}$	4.69	6.04	3.81**
	SD	2.01	1.39	
Importance of ² Church	$\bar{x}$	4.67	6.60	6.26**
	SD	1.88	.63	
Strength of ³ Faith	$\bar{x}$	5.46	6.51	3.71**
	SD	1.71	.74	

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

¹1 = Never; 7 = Frequently

²1 = Little Importance; 7 = Great Importance

³1 = Little Faith; 7 = Complete Faith